



# County of Erie

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**HEALTH ADVISORY # 299**

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## **GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESS CAUSED BY *E. COLI* O157:H7 ASSOCIATED WITH WEGMANS SALAD MIX**

**Please distribute to the Healthcare Providers, Infection Control Department,  
Emergency Department, Employee Health Service, Infectious Disease Department,  
Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Laboratory Service, and all patient care areas.**

### **SUMMARY**

- The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) along with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and other New York State local county health departments are currently investigating a cluster of 21 cases of *E. coli* O157:H7 infections in New York State. Cases have been identified in Monroe(11), Niagara(4), Erie(2), Steuben(2), Wayne(1), and Oneida(1) counties. Of those interviewed, illness onset has been between 10/18/2012 and 10/29/2012. Sixteen cases have been identified as having a common source of exposure, Wegmans Organic Spinach & Spring Salad Mix, which has been recalled.
- Providers should consider *E. coli* O157:H7 in the differential diagnosis of patients presenting with acute onset of bloody diarrhea, diarrhea with or without fever, hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), or thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura (TTP), particularly among those patients with an exposure history of Wegmans salad mix.
- Most local laboratories automatically test for *E. coli* O157:H7 when a stool culture is submitted. ECDOH reminds physicians to verify their local laboratory will test for *E. coli* O157:H7.
- Suspect or confirmed cases should be reported to the local health department where the patient lives.

### **BACKGROUND**

On October, 26, 2012, the NYSDOH was notified of a cluster of *E. coli* cases in the western part of the state. Nineteen cases were identified with *E. coli* O157:H7. Of those interviewed, illness onset has been between 10/18/2012 and 10/29/2012. Cases are between 6 and 66 years of age. NYSDOH's Wadsworth Center Laboratory has identified matching molecular patterns in 5 specimens received from 6 patients. Cases have been identified in Monroe, Wayne, Niagara, Erie, Steuben and Oneida county residents.

Wegmans' Food You Feel Good About Organic Spinach & Spring Mix (5oz. and 11oz. sizes) has been identified as a common source of exposure in most cases. On 11/1/2012, Wegmans recalled all of this mix sold between 10/14/12 and 11/1/12 because of possible contamination with *E. coli* O157:H7.

## **EPIDEMIOLOGY AND CLINICAL PRESENTATION**

*E. coli* O157:H7 is a Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC). STEC cause approximately 250,000 illnesses, 3,500 hospitalizations, and 30 deaths annually in the U.S. Approximately 95,000 STEC infections in the U.S. are caused by *E. coli* O157:H7 each year.

Physicians evaluating patients presenting with gastrointestinal illness, particular bloody diarrhea, should include *E. coli* O157:H7 in their differential diagnosis. *E. coli* O157:H7 infection causes diarrhea that is bloody and often accompanied by abdominal cramps and fever; however, infection may also present with a wide variety of clinical features, including watery diarrhea, HUS, or TTP. The absence of bloody stools or fever does not rule out the possibility of an *E. coli* O157:H7-associated diarrheal illness.

The absence of high fever, grossly bloody stools, or severe abdominal findings can lead to the mistaken diagnosis of intussusception in children, and inflammatory bowel disease or ischemic colitis in the elderly. Symptoms typically begin 3 to 4 days after exposure, but can range from 2 to 10 days. The illness typically resolves within 1 week; however, some patients, especially children <5 years of age, may develop HUS, a life threatening condition characterized by thrombocytopenia, hemolytic anemia, and renal failure.

## **DIAGNOSIS, TESTING AND PREVENTING FURTHER SPREAD**

- Stool specimens should be collected as soon as possible, while the patient is acutely ill. It is difficult to detect bacteria in the stool after 1 week of illness.
- Most local laboratories automatically test for *E. coli* O157:H7 when stool culture is submitted, but physicians should verify that their local laboratory will test for *E. coli* O157:H7.
- Physicians should remind patients to thoroughly wash hands after using the toilet, changing diapers, or coming in contact with fecal matter in any way.
- Persons who work in a sensitive setting, such as patient care, food service, or day care and who are experiencing gastrointestinal illness should notify their employer and stay home from work until they have been tested for *E. coli* and other pathogens. Those positive for *E. coli* may not return to work until 2 successive stool samples collected 24 hours apart and obtained no sooner than 48 hours after the last dose of antibiotics (if given) have tested negative.
- Children in day care centers who have diarrhea (one or more loose stools in a 24 hour period) must be sent home and advised to seek medical attention. Children who have been diagnosed with *E. coli* must be excluded until clearance is obtained from the local health department, once 2 successive stool samples collected 24 hours apart and obtained no sooner than 48 hours after the last dose of antibiotics (if given) have tested negative.

## **REPORTING**

All laboratory positive *E. coli* O157:H7 cases and any suspected cases of HUS should be reported to the local health department where the patient resides. For reporting Erie County residents or questions regarding this information, please contact the ECDOH Epidemiology and

Surveillance Program at (716) 858-7697 (Monday – Friday 8:00am to 4:00pm) or (716) 961-7898 after normal business hours.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Additional information on *E. coli* O157:H7 can be found at:  
[http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/e\\_coli/fact\\_sheet](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/e_coli/fact_sheet)

Information on communicable disease reporting, including the list of reportable diseases, reporting guidance, and contact information for the Erie County Health Department and other local health departments, can be found at:  
<http://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/diseases/reporting/communicable/>

### **Health Category Definitions:**

**Health Alert FLASH:** conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

**Health Alert Priority:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary

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The ECDOH Health Alert & Advisory System is an e-mail notification system designed to alert community partners about important health related information. You can sign up to receive alerts & advisories at <http://www2.erie.gov/health/index.php?q=node/59>.